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ABSTRACT

Information is given about the cultural and religious background of Indochinese refugees arriving in the United States since 1975, to be used as a basis for promoting cross-cultural adjustment and communication with and in this group. The Indochinese exodus since 1975 is briefly described, focusing on the journey undertaken and the spread of refugees around the world. Common Indochinese traditions are outlined, including family life and behaviors, interpersonal expectations, and communication styles. An examination of common Indochinese psycho-religious forces looks at popular beliefs and the cult of the ancestors, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. A section on cross-cultural adjustment looks at common problems, among them relationships within communities and families, relationships with other groups, organizational participation, and the minimal use of mass media for communication. Adjustment in and among age groups is discussed for the elderly, adults, and children, and recommendations are made for supporting each group. General recommendations are also made for supporting social cohesiveness and cross-cultural harmony for Indochinese refugees, covering bilingual-bicultural education, English language training, cultural orientation, family ties, counseling, community networks, cultural orientation training for service agencies, and cross-cultural communication. (MSE)

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INDOCHINESE CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Nguyen Dang Liem

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INTRODUCTION

Chiều chiều ra đứng cửa sau
Ngó về quê mẹ ruột đau chín chiều
Every afternoon, I go and stand at the threshold
of the back door.
My eyes are fixed toward my native horizon, and
I feel a heartbreaking nostalgia.

The Vietnamese lullaby reflects well the feelings of Indochinese refugees.

The massive and controversial movement of Indochinese refugees in recent years creates formidable pragmatic and ethical considerations. Thousands of people have been condemned to death at sea by refusal of aid or sanctuary. Other tens of thousands languish in camps today. Assumptions about refugees, often implicit, generate attitudes which become uncritically translated into public policy and personal behavior. Meaningful debate of the morality and practicality of policy positions and individual attitudes requires better understanding of the refugee experience, behavior and communicative styles.*

When the refugees from Indochina first came in 1975, the United States government was more concerned about self-sufficiency and employment of these people than about their cross-cultural adjustment and communication. Federally funded programs under the Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program (IRAP) (which became the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) after the influx on Cubans and Haitians in 1980), have since stressed the vocational training of household heads and almost totally ignored needs for cross-

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*This paper greatly benefits from the meticulous editorial comments and valuable recommendations of Michelle Barker, a graduate student in the School of Social Work of the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Miss Barker is employed as a Social Worker in the area of Indochinese refugee resettlement in Australia.

cultural adjustment and communication. The Refugee Act of 1980, passed by the United States Congress, approved the creation of the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Department of Health and Human Services to administer a program of language and job training.

In declaring the passing of the bill (which would later become the Refugee Act of 1980) by the House Judiciary Committee, Representative Elizabeth Holzman, D-NY, chair, House Immigration and Refugee Subcommittee, declared on September 19, 1979:

"For the first time we have a comprehensive resettlement program." The so called "comprehensive resettlement program" emphasized language and job training, and apparently benefitted only a segment of the refugee population, namely the young and able household heads, whom are males. It did not cater to the needs of the women who are homebound because of the presence of their young children, and the elderly. Furthermore, the program did not mention education in cross-cultural adjustment and communication. The aim of this paper is, then, to present the cross-cultural adjustment of Indochinese refugees and Indochinese-American cross-cultural communication. It will do so by reviewing the circumstances under which these people came to the United States and the rest of the Western world, the effects of their traditions on their adjustment process, the psycho-religious forces that dictate their way of life, thinking, and behavior, and their adjustment patterns. Since the cross-cultural adjustment of the Indochinese is a direct corrolate of the conflict and social cohesiveness between these people, their host community and school setting, this paper will also propose solutions to eradicate conflict and to promote social harmony and

cooperation, especially in the area of cross-cultural communication.*

1. INDOCHINESE EXODUS SINCE 1975

With the sudden fall of Vietnam in April 1975, some 125,000 Vietnamese were hurriedly evacuated to Wake Island, Guam, and the Philippines. The first groups left by airplane straight from Tan Son Nhut Airport, and the last ones by helicopters or small boats from Saigon and then by ships from the high seas off the coast of Vung Tau. From the Pacific Islands, the people were sent to refugee camps in California, Arkansas, Florida, Pennsylvania, and to France, Canada, and Australia. Beginning also in April or shortly after, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees crossed the borders into Thailand, and crowded makeshift refugee camps.

Life in camps in Thailand, Wake Island, Guam, the Philippines, and in the United States was hard and full of uncertainties. Everything was new and strange: the food, camp life, the search for sponsors, lack of medical assistance, burning heat and chilling cold, and the communication gap between camp authorities and refugees. The camp authorities wanted to move the refugees as soon as possible, but the sponsors were scattered throughout the nation and the usually large families of refugees were split up, with members separated from one another by thousands of miles. This situation and the fact that over 75 percent of the refugees still had members of their immediate families in their native countries, increased the already strong tendency to fatalism among the people. They kept

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*Since his main goal is to present the cross-cultural adjustment of Indochinese refugees and Indochinese-American cross-cultural communication, the writer stresses similarities between the various people from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (in this paper). A brief description of the ethnic groups and their geographic environment appears in the appendices.

aloof and non-communicative with the outside world, while they searched for guidance for their behavior from popular beliefs, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.

Since 1975, people have continued to flee Vietnam in unseaworthy fishing boats and rafts, or to cross the fireline at the borders of Laos and Cambodia to get to Thailand. It is estimated that half of the Vietnamese never make port, and half of the Lao and Cambodians never reach Thailand. Those more fortunate get to other countries, such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, or the Philippines. From July 1979 to approximately the end of 1981, the United States has been accepting 14,000 Indochinese refugees monthly, particularly those already in camps in Southeast Asia. There are now approximately three quarters of a million Indochinese in the United States. Other countries such as France, Canada, and Australia also pledged to accept more Indochinese refugees at the International Conference on Indochinese Refugees in Geneva in July, 1979. Presently, there are some 200,000 Indochinese in camps in Southeast Asia. The Orderly Departure Program which allows qualified Vietnamese to leave the country is being encouraged for humanitarian purposes such as family reunions.

2. COMMON INDOCHINESE TRADITIONS

It is not possible to develop an understanding of the adjustment process and cross-cultural communication pitfalls of Indochinese refugees without a knowledge of what life was like for these people in their homeland.

Life in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam is based on a "rice culture" attuned to the rhythms of seasons of planting and harvesting. For a thousand years, the technology of the water buffalo was stable in the

lowlands, and the method of slash-and-burn rice cultivation was traditional among the people in the highlands of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. One's ancestors, the source of one's life, had planted and reaped on this land. Their graves stood in the rice fields and their spirits continued to watch over the family. Individual death did not mark an end. Here the past and present merged: there existed the sense of a natural harmony between the people of the land, between the living and the dead.

The cradle of Indochinese society was the village. Enclosed behind a tall bamboo hedge in other societies, each village was a separate entity, complete with its own population, customs, and even its own deity enshrined in a communal house, a tiny world within the rural world of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. The village provided the individual with security in a potentially hostile environment. Within its web of social relations, one's place and duties were exactly defined even in the language itself: the use of kinship terms as personal pronouns in the Indochinese languages always indicated the social, hierarchical, or age relationship of the two speakers. In the past, few people left the villages where they were born, for to do so was to leave their place in the world, to lose touch with their past and their ancestors' interactions, entering a moral, legal, and spiritual void. Thus, communication with people from other villages, let alone foreigners, were either nonexistent or based upon an inherent distrust. One could consider these settings rustic, yet it was within the encircling hedges of the villages and the absence of communication with the outside world that the people of Indochina found the strength to carry on a resistance to cultural and racial assimilation.

In Indochina, the family rather than the individual, is the basic unit of society and harmony in personal relationships is valued more than personal achievement and competitiveness, which are deemed selfish.

Intelligence, scholarship, and, by extension, wisdom are valued more than physical prowess or bravery for its own sake. Physical beauty and grace are important attributes for both men and women, but virtue is praised more highly.

Filial devotion, brotherly love, and conjugal fidelity are highly valued. Marriage was formerly arranged by the family. Second wives and mistresses have been an institution reluctantly tolerated by the first wives. Refugees who come to the U.S. have to abide by the law which allows a man to have only one wife.

In communicating with the people from Indochina, Western observers have often been intrigued with their grace, charm, intelligence, and apparent friendliness. They have also come to realize that the character of these people is more complex than initially suspected (Liem, 1980a).

Long experience with foreign domination has taught the people of Indochina a wariness of all strangers, never entirely nullified by the desire for friendship and mutual understanding. One must never be in a hurry to explain oneself. The Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese possess an inwardness, a well-developed ability to keep their true feelings hidden. Desires are expressed by indirection, by hinting, and "talking around" the subject.

American straightforwardness is considered at best impolite, if not brutal. In Indochina, one does not come directly to the point. To do so is, for an American a mark of honesty and forthrightness while a person from Indochina sees it as a lack of intelligence or courtesy. Falsehood carries no moral structure for a Cambodian, Laotian, or Vietnamese. The essential question is not whether a statement is true or false, but what

the intention of the statement is. Does it facilitate interpersonal harmony? Does it indicate a wish to change the subject? Hence, one must learn the "heart" of the speaker through his/her words.

In Indochina, one thinks very carefully before speaking. The American style of "speaking one's mind" is thus misunderstood. The Indochinese listener looks for hidden meanings which can't be found but to be looked for and perhaps "found." On the American side, meanings present are missed, leading the Indochinese to regard Americans as "unintelligent."

The Indochinese, (accustomed to their behavioral norms and communicative styles,) are likely to encounter cross-cultural difficulties as they try to adjust to different behavioral norms and communication styles.

3. COMMON INDOCHINESE PSYCHO-RELIGIOUS FORCES

Before the cross-cultural adjustment of the Indochinese is discussed, it is crucial to recapitulate the common moral and religious universe of these people, that is, their psycho-religious universe. Their religious universe is composed of Buddhism, the cult of ancestors, popular beliefs, Confucianism and Taoism. To these psycho-religious and philosophical elements, Christianity was added in recent history. There seems to be a perfect harmony of religions in Indochina in that their teachings co-exist as an amalgamous wisdom guiding the behavior of each Indochinese person whether Buddhist, ancestors' worshipper or Christian.

(a) Popular Beliefs and the Cult of the Ancestors

Nowhere on earth, according to the philosopher Jung, does a society exist which is not convinced of the immortal and transcendental nature of the human soul, embodied in a psychic principle capable of surviving the disintegration of the body.

With the Indochinese, this psychic principle consists of a number of more or less pure elements: the souls and vital principles whose numbers vary from one ethnic group's beliefs to another's. The number of souls ("HỒN") and vital principles ("PHÁCH") varies from males and females: man possesses three souls which command the superior functions such as life, intelligence, and perception, and seven vital principles which are concerned with the visceral functions; woman is said to have nine vital principles instead of seven because of her supplementary responsibilities of childbearing. Of the three souls of human beings, the "LINH HỒN", or the sould for intelligence is the transcendental one. While the principles related to the organic functions wane with life, the "LINH HỒN" possesses the capacity for survival. This is the origin of the Cult of the Ancestors which is practiced by the Vietnamese and other Indochinese people.

The Cult of the Ancestors requires that one must honor the dead on a par with the living; and the greatest misfortune conceivable is to die without leaving a male descendant to perpetuate the Cult of the Ancestors. If a person dies without leaving any descendants at all, however, the souls of the dead, for lack of homage and honor on the occasions of traditional feasts and anniversaries, are doomed to eternal wandering--one of the most appalling maledictions which could afflict any family. It is thus that the custom of polygamy among the Indochinese was explained, and justified in the eyes of the law, because it more or less assured that there would be a descendant to participate in the cult. Adoption was considered to be a last resort.

The Cult of the Ancestors is accompanied by a (range/variety) of beliefs and practices. The Vietnamese believe that the souls of their ancestors are the natural protectors of the family line: it is to them

that prayers are addressed, imploring, for example, the curing of a sick child; their influence, and the sum of good actions they accomplished in their lifetimes, are also used to explain success in business, in examinations, and all other fortunate developments.

In the family, the ancestors's altar is the piece of furniture of greatest value. It is the place where the entire family gathers on the occasions of the main feasts of the year. It is a rallying place--a symbol of family solidarity. Around the altar, in presence of the ancestors, all discord must disappear; and it is before the altar that major decisions are made, and marriages consumated.

The Cult of Ancestors, which has no connection with religious faith, exerts a profound influence on the daily life of the Indochinese people. The recollection of the ancestors--the fear of offending them or soiling their reputations--coupled with the desire to please them, are sources of inspiration, which guide the actions of the descendants. Even for a hardened sinner to lack respect for the ancestors is the worst offense imaginable.

The Cult of the Ancestors can act as a substitute for religion, and many Indochinese content themselves with it. But this cult is only a consequence or a sort of continuation of the respect owed to the parents beyond their terrestrial existence. Thus, filial piety and the cult of the ancestors are but two aspects of a single obligation. Filial piety stems from the idea that a child is indebted to his parents for all the sacrifices they made for his upbringing and education. The child thus owes his parents many favors and kindnesses, in addition to gratitude for the greatest kindnesses of all: the gift of life. Consequently,

the child thus owes submission to the authors of his existence no matter what his age. When his parents grow older, he ought to prove his gratitude by providing for their wants, as in the words of a Vietnamese popular song:

> The kindnesses of my father are comparable to the Thai mountain,
> Those of my mother, to a perennial Spring.
> With great fervor I venerate my father and my mother,
> In order to conduct myself as a pious son.

(b) Buddhism

Buddhism is practiced by the majority of Cambodians, Lao, Vietnamese, and Chinese Vietnamese. According to Buddhism, life is a vast sea of suffering in which one wallows hopelessly. In effect, the vicious circle of existence is renewal in the course of endless reincarnations. The cause of suffering is desire: desire for life, happiness, riches, or power. If desire were suppressed, the cause of pain would be destroyed. The essence of Buddhist teaching is contained in the concept of Karma, the law of causality: the present existence is conditioned by earlier existences and will condition those that follow. Thus the virtuous person should strive constantly to improve by doing good deeds and by renouncing sensual pleasures in order to become conscious of Buddha who is present in every living being. Consequently, desire must be first overcome and a pure heart is necessary to break the chains binding one to an earthly existence in order to reach the state of bliss called Nirvana.

(c) Confucianism

Confucianism as a religion or philosophy of life is prevalent among the Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese. Its concepts of social hierarchy and piety exist among other people of Indochina. Whereas Buddhism teaches the

Indochinese to strive for Nirvana, Confucianism addresses social problems. Confucius founded his doctrine on the basis of etiology. He said that the stabilizing of a regime depends on an ideal and this ideal can have value only if it is based on great examples from the past.

The doctrine of Confucius is set forth in the four classical texts called "TỨ THƯ" and in the five cannonical works called "NGŨ KINH". Following are the Confucian teaching points that will help us understand the behavior and the adjustment problems of the Indochinese. These points are: the innate goodness of man, self-perfection, and social relations.

The Innate Goodness of Man.

According to Mencius, the most distinguished of Confucius' disciples, a man is inherently good; and to preserve this inherent goodness, it is only necessary to keep passions in check. If men do not live up to their potential goodness, it is because they neglect their intellect, which atrophies in the hum-drum routine of everyday life. The wise man, in contrast to the ordinary man, improves himself through study; he knows himself, and is the master of his passions. For this he will be honored by his heirs, and his soul will have peace in the hereafter. In sum, those who do good are rewarded and those who do evil must suffer the consequences.

Self-Perfection. According to Confucius, there are four rules which must be followed to achieve perfection. First, one must be interested in everything which exists, and second, be able to penetrate the secret, inner essence of things. The third requirement is clear thinking, and the fourth is a pure heart.

Social Relations.

Confucianism is a doctrine of social hierarchies. It defines the

attitudes which each member of the society should have by rigid rules; and it prescribes the formula for three all-important sets of social interaction, called "Tam Cương." These interactions are between ruler and subject, "Quân Thần," between father and son, "Phu Tu," and between husband and wife, "Phu Phụ." It also dictates a moral code for the man of virtue, "Quân Tử," who should be a living example of the five cardinal virtues humanity, equity, urbanity, intelligence and honesty. The man of virtue should also follow a path of moderation: exaggeration in any direction is to be avoided, and equanimity is to be cultivated. This attitude has often been mistaken by Westerners for impassiveness, placidity, or even hypocrisy. This moral perfection may be progressively attained by traversing four essential steps: the improvement of oneself, the management for the family, the governing of the country, and finally, the pacification of the world.

As for the woman, she should in all circumstances conform to the three obediences: obedience to her father until she is married, obedience to her husband after she leaves her father's house, and obedience to her eldest son, should she be widowed. Further, the model woman should possess the four essential virtues: skill with her hands, agreeable appearance, prudence in speech, and exemplary conduct.

(d) Taoism

Similarly to Confucianism, Taoism has direct influence on the way of life of the Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese. His concept of harmony, however, permeates other Indochinese cultures as well. Whereas Buddhism teaches the Vietnamese to seek happiness after life in the form of Nirvana free from the vicious circle of life and death, Confucianism and Taoism both teach seeking of happiness in the present. The former essentially

recommends dynamism, activity, and advancement by means of self-improvement; the latter essentially advocates inertia, blending with nature and harmony with self, with fellow human beings, and with the universe. Thus, one could picture the Buddhist way toward happiness in Nirvana as a direction vertically upward, the Confucian trajectory toward happiness as a horizontal arrow forward, and the Taoist road toward happiness as a horizontal arrow but directly opposite that of the Confucian one. From this picture, it is possible to see how the Taoist influence suggests a neglect of material possessions, success, power, and activities. It directs the Indochinese to look for pleasure and contentment in nature, quietness, and a peaceful worriless mind. Especially when faced with apparently insurmountable difficulties such as those of a refugee, a defeatist attitude toward the outside world in general, and toward communication with fellow human beings in particular may be adopted.

In comparison with the other religions, Christianity was introduced to Indochina relatively recently. It was not until the 16th century that Christian missionaries began preaching the Gospel in Vietnam. As was said earlier in this paper, whether a Vietnamese is Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian or Christian, the teachings of Buddha, Confucius and Lao Tsu constitute a source of wisdom which dictate his behavior in general and his communicative style in particular. Added to these religious forces, his native geographic and historical conditions also play an important role in his world view.

Despite more recent moves to the cities, the Indochinese kept their roots in the villages where agriculture prevailed and dictated the mode of life. For this reason, the Indochinese peasants face natural

catastrophies stoically. Intelligent in their daily work, knowing how to cope with inevitable disasters, they were truly Pascal's "thinking reeds" which bend but do not break under strong winds. This flexibility when faced with difficulties has helped the Indochinese endure through the long years of war, and the trauma of their exodus and resettlement. It is hoped that it will help them in their cross-cultural communication and integration into the host community. Their adjustment may be hindered by nostalgia, loneliness, and even lack of stamina due to their attachment to their native land.

4. CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The adjustment of Indochinese refugees is dependent on both the degree of social cohesiveness within their own communities, and their relationship with the American host community.

(1) Relationships among their Communities and Families

Following are the common problems among the Indochinese refugees of all ages within their own families and communities:

--being separated from missing family members

--painful memories from war and departure from home country

--homesickness

--difficulty in communication with family in home country

--lack of native community support

--family conflicts due to role reversals

(2) Relationships with other groups

An overall lack of English language competence among the population, especially among the elderly and home-bound women, prevents them from having meaningful relationships with their host community, citizens and students organizations,

and often civic clubs. It also hinders their use of health and social services.

(3) Organizational Participation

There is almost a total lack of participation in American organization by the Indochinese elderly, a matter explained by their English language proficiency. In places where there are well organized Indochinese mutual assistance associations, the elderly have an opportunity to meet with their own people.

Indochinese home-bound women more actively participate in mutual assistance and religions associations than their male counterparts. It is also very encouraging to see Indochinese high school and elementary students getting more and more involved in extracurricular school activities.

(4) Use of Mass Media

Because of their deficiency in the English language, the use of mass media in English as a means of information is minimal among the elderly population. The elderly and adults read local newsletters and US-mainland journals in their vernaculars. It is a great source of consolation for them to publish in these newsletters.

4.1. ADJUSTMENT ACROSS AGE GROUPS

Ingrained in their traditions and governed by their psycho-religious forces, the Indochinese elderly more than any other age group among the refugees, are encountering the difficult task of dealing with many unfamiliar aspects of life. The adult group, eighteen to forty years of age, has the economic advantage of work and earnings but is psychologically

disadvantaged because its members were born and raised in the midst of confusion and war. Children seem to adjust themselves in the new cultural environment faster than the other two groups. But they run another kind of risk, namely of being in a cultural vacuum and of not firmly and deeply grasping either the Indochinese way of life or American behavioral patterns.* Across all ages, there is a common element: the refugees experience more or less acutely "culture shock" which may entail severe mental, emotional, behavioral and psychosomatic difficulties. Culture shock is largely due to adjusting the differences between one's native way of life and the new environment. Human beings, however, possess the ability to adjust or adapt to the new conditions, and patterns of social interaction.

The following discussion will focus on the different adjustment patterns of the elderly, adults, and children.

4.2. ADJUSTMENT OF THE ELDERLY

While retirement age is normally 65 in the United States, it used to be 55 for white collar workers in Indochina or whenever the farmer's children started working in the fields and are able to support him. When one retired, his financial needs were met by his children as discussed in the previous section on the family system and respect for parents. In the United States, the Indochinese elderly's children, even when they want to, are unlikely to be able to support them. They have to rely upon Social Security income/benefits which are minimal for them since they have not worked in this country and contributed to it, and which carries in their own eyes a psychological stigma of being abandoned by their

children.

As for the employment of those who consider themselves to be elderly but who are under 65, it is difficult for them to find a job because of the lack of knowledge of English and marketable skills. For the lucky ones who have a menial job, their income is predictably very low.

Acculturation motivation

Most if not all the Indochinese elderly left their country with the sole purpose of being with their children and grandchildren. A few of them are preliterate in their native language. The majority of them, even if they have been attending English for the last five or six years, do not speak enough English for their daily living. Because of their original purpose of coming to the United States and their linguistic handicap, the Indochinese elderly are generally not highly motivated to learn about the American culture and social system, let alone to socialize with the American people.

Image of self and others

Because of their loss of their children's financial support and their own respect and role in the family, the Indochinese elderly tend to have a low self-esteem.

Feeling of alienation

Because of their considerable difficulties in adjusting to the new linguistic and cultural environment, the Indochinese elderly feel alienated from the host community. Ironically, they also feel that they are not as useful to their own groups as they should be, consequently they also feel a certain degree of alienation within their own people.

The elderly's fear of death

As mentioned earlier, the Indochinese elderly believe in the immortality of the soul. In order for their souls to have a secure life after death, there should be proper ceremonies at the funerals and good care for their souls after their death. Unsure of a piece of land for their tombs, necessary offerings, and the existence of an ancestor's altar, the elderly are fearful of their future after death.

Recommendations

In his transactions with the Indochinese elderly, the American should remember the Confucian hierarchy according to age mentioned above. He should always show them his respect both linguistically and extra-linguistically. The rule requires that he sit still in front of elderly people, his eyes are directed downwards and not straight to his interlocutors, and his feet should be flat on the ground and not crossed. Gesticulation is considered to be bad manners.

4.3. ADJUSTMENT OF THE ADULTS

The majority of Indochinese adults have a high acculturation motivation because they see their future in this country. However, they likely have a low self-image and a feeling of alienation like the elderly.

According to a survey in Illinois in 1980 (Kim 1980), the rate of unemployment of Indochinese refugees steadfastly decreases as the length of their stay in the United States increases (62% unemployment rate among the fifth-year residints (Kim 1980: 13). The same study shows that the income level of Indochinese refugees raises parallely with their length of residency.

The general pattern of employment of Indochinese refugees is that the majority of them start with menial jobs. This state is a viable cause for social conflict between the newcomers and the unskilled oldtimers. Similarly the fact that the refugees depend on public financial assistance in one form or another when their income is low and that they compete for low cost housing is another cause for potential inter-ethnic conflict.

Pertinent to the employment and social interaction is the Confucian social hierarchy mentioned above, namely between ruler and subject, which explains the success or failure in the relationship between the Indochinese worker (in the role of a subject) and his employer (in the role of a ruler), as well as in the relationship between the refugee himself and his sponsor.

The Indochinese employee considers his employer as his mentor. As such, the latter is expected to give guidance, advice, and encouragement, and the former is supposed to execute orders, to perform his task quietly, and not to ask questions or have doubts about the orders. This seemingly passive and unimaginative attitude is aggravated by a linguistic difference between other Indochinese languages and English. For example, the Vietnamese literal equivalent of the English word "Yes" is "Dạ" (pronounced ""Ya" in the Southern Vietnamese dialect). However, whereas the English "Yes" means unequivocally "Yes", the Vietnamese "Dạ" means a variety of things. In the final analysis, it can mean "Yes", but in general usage it merely means "I am politely listening to you", and it does not at all mean that "I agree with you". The listener may disagree with what he hears, but due to his politeness and deference to his boss (or his

sponsor), cannot say no. His English "Yes", for him conveys the polite and non-committal Vietnamese "Dạ", but to the American it can carry only its English meaning. Thus, the Vietnamese may appear insincere, or even stupid to the American.

The enigmatic smile

Another factor that can contribute to strain and misunderstanding between the Indochinese and the American is the enigmatic Indochinese smile. The Indochinese smiles when politeness prevents him from contradicting his interlocutor. He also smiles when he does not completely understand what is said to him and yet, also out of politeness, does not want to ask for clarification.

At the same time, the Indochinese expects his employer to be paternalistic, kind, and soft-spoken. The latter's direct and straightforward speech sounds rude to him. And because he is not supposed to retort or talk back, the only alternative for him is to try to swallow his frustration until he cannot bear it any more. At that time, his last recourse is to resign and to look for another boss who would be more understanding and kind by Indochinese standards. This problem of communication is aggravated by the fact that, being in a strange environment and new job, and in most cases not speaking English well enough to express his thoughts, the Indochinese is likely to misunderstand his American boss and is likely to be misunderstood by him.

Marital Relationships

Also, relevant to the pattern of employment of Indochinese is the third set of Confucian social interaction, that between husband and

wife mentioned above.

It is quite apparent that the role of the traditional Indochinese woman and her relationship to her husband according to the Confucian norm, may clash with the reality of the American environment. In most cases, the husband's salary alone is not sufficient to meet the high cost of living in the United States. The wife then has to work to supplement the family's income and often is able to get a more lucrative job than her husband's. Furthermore, nature seems to favor women in their second language learning and hence the wife makes better progress in speaking English. Again, there is a role reversal. The husband feels, either consciously or unconsciously, threatened. On the other hand, the wife, because of her work and interaction with the outside world, does not have enough time to perform her traditional role in the family. Being exposed for the first time to the "Women's Liberation Movement" --freedom, self-sufficiency, and equality, the Indochinese woman may react more strongly against the traditional role than her American counterpart. This conflict between her husband's conservative expectations and the role of women in American society may precipitate breakdowns in the family structure. All this may cause marital problems as seen in a growing number of divorces.
In the past, the expectation of the four traditional virtues limited the education of the Indochinese woman to the high school diploma in the majority of cases. In Hawaii particularly where the job market is tight, openings for the Indochinese woman often are found in jobs related to the tourist industry and often requires them to work at night. These jobs are distasteful and arouse the suspicions of her husband. This may be another source of marital conflict.

Recommendation

In his relationship with an Indochinese couple, the American man should always bear in mind the above Confucian set of social interaction between husband and wife. Whether he is a counselor, social worker, doctor, or salesman, the Confucian etiquette requires that he talk to the husband first before talking to the wife. Even while he is talking to the wife, he should always make the husband feel that he is the head of his family. His sitting arrangement vis-a-vis the two of them should also reflect this male preponderence: the husband should be in front of, and closer to him than the wife.

4.4. ADJUSTMENT OF THE CHILDREN

Indochinese children mostly have the acculturation motivation, self-image and feeling of alienation transmitted to them by their parents.

The set of social interaction between father and son in Confucianism is governed by the rule of total obedience of the son to the father mentioned above. In terms of psycho-cultural adjustment the rule of order may create conflict between the father and his sons and daughters in this country. The father adapts more slowly, if at all, to the American culture where his relationship to his children is less formal and restrictive than what he is used to. He expects them to conform to the Confucian order just as he himself did in his relationship to his own father. But the children are socializing with their own age group here and tend to act in the American way. Also in most cases, if not all, the children speak English better than their father. The father resents the reversal of roles, his children feel

it, and the situation could explode into an open confrontation between the two. Or, the children may conform to the traditional norm of relationship with their father. In that case, they may feel their difference to their peer group.

Recommendation

When working with Indochinese families, it is important to respect the fatner's position in the family. In some cases it is necessary to use the child as an interpreter, for his English may be better than his parents.

However, questions to the father should be addressed directly to him, and not to the child. The same principle holds when working with an interpreter in other situations.

Due to the influence of filial piety on the daily life of Indochinese, teachers and counsellors need to be aware that Indochinese students may approach career choices in a different manner to American students.

The parents of the Indochinese student may have directed him about whether he should continue on to college, or even the exact career to follow.

As Indochinese children become more exposed to the American norm of independence from parents, they may be caught between their own desires and the will of their parents.

Press reports indicate that like many Asian-Americans, Indochinese students are achieving very high standards in American high schools. Reasons for the 'super-achievement' of some students is attributed to high achievement motivation, the students' desire to please their

parents, and the emphasis placed on education in Vietnamese culture. This also creates additonal stress for the students during their adjustment to American society.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL COHESIVENESS AND CROSS-CULTURAL HARMONY

As was stated earlier, the Refugee Act of 1980 aims at self-sufficiency among the refugee population. Consequently, English language and vocational training accounts for most of the programs Federally-funded under the Act. It benefits mostly employable household heads--the majority of them are male--and leaves the homebound women and elderly unassisted. Furthermore, it ignores the whole area of cross-cultural understanding and adjustment, a matter that seems to be of utmost importance considering the outbreaks of inter-ethnic tensions surfacing in various parts of the United States.[1]

The following recommendations pertain to Indochinese refugee population in the nation:

(a) Bilingual bicultural education

A bilingual bicultural education program for Indochinese students in particular and for refugees and immigrants in general would greatly diminish inter-ethnic conflicts and would significantly contribute to inter-ethnic conflicts and would significantly contribute to inter-racial cooperation and harmony.

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1. In transitonal camps in Southeast Asia, the United States in collaboration with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, has set up very valuable educational programs in English as a Second Language and Cultural orientation.

It should have a twofold purpose: (1) to establish the right to use and retain the vernacular in education, and (2) to provide a more humane and pedagogically more realistic approach to the learning of English as a second language by ethnic minorities (re: Liem 1979).

(b) English Language Training

Because of its prime importance in all aspects of resettlement and adjustment, English language training deserves the highest priority in any program. It should be tailored according to the specific needs of its clientele --i.e. an ESL program for the pre-literate elderly should emphasize survival skill, while a curriculum of English for special purpose for the job-bound learner should be oriented to that job situation (see Liem, 1980b and 1980c). In other words, it is strongly recommended that English language classes be set up for the elderly and the homebound women. Such English classes should be experientially relevant to daily life situations.

(c) Cultural Orientation

The Indochinese like the rest of the refugee population in the nation, need a practical program of cross-cultural communication and orientation ranging from house-keeping to how to introduce oneself to one's neighbors. This program should be parallely conducted with the ESL program, and could be best done in the native languages by the refugee mutual assistance associaitons. It should present the hearthian culture (i.e. the do's and don't's, thepecking order, the way of life, how people cater to their personal, educational and religious needs) and the Olympian Culture (i.e. the highlights of people, the arts, theater, contents of museums, etc.) of both the

American and the Vietnamese cultures for comparison purposes.

(d) Family Ties

The strong, traditional ties amongst Indochinese families can be used in resettlement. It is encouraging to note attempts by community organizations throughout the U.S. of trying to re-establish the elderly's primary role in teaching and caring for their grandchildren.

Working mothers may also be attracted to child care facilities where other Indochinese women are employed as care-givers.

(e) Counseling

Counseling services should be more readily available and culturally relevant to the needs of the refugees. For example, to an Indochinese who feels that he has lost relatives and friends, the Buddhist concept of reincarnation could be soothing in that he would have hope for seeing his beloved ones in next life. To the one who has lost his status and fortune, the Taoist quest for a return to simplicity, harmony and nature could very well be a source of hope and strength. Further, to acknowledge someone who misses his past glory as a high ranking government official, and to remind him that his grandchildren are doing very well in school is to give him a perfect Confucian consolation and encouragement. It helps him recognize that there is generational progress in his family.

Some family counseling needs to be done in order to help the refugees to adapt traditional family roles and ties to the present environment: for example, helping parents to understand that their working daughter-in-law is not able to perform all her traditional duties to her in-laws and ancestors, because of the pressures of her other responsibilities more attention should be given to training ethnic welfare workers to

work with their own communities.

(f) Community Networks

The traditional mutual assistance network among villagers could be revived in mutual assistance associations (MAA) where the elderly could give advice--which is of real help in mental health and greatly appreciated--to adults, and teach children to preserve their linguistic and cultural heritage. The Refugees of Indochina Culture Education mental health service in Honolulu (Sanb rn and Liem, 1978) used the elderly and community leaders as "gateway keepers" whose role was to counsel in minor cases and to refer critical cases to the service. It is proved to be very beneficial to both the elderly and the entire community. Such MAAs will also be most culturally, linguistically and psychologically beneficial to adults and children alike.

(g) Cultural Orientation Training for Service Agencies

Intercultural communication just like interpersonal communication is a two-way process. The refugees need to be sensitive to the communicative styles and behavioral norms of the service providers in their host society. However, teachers, counselors and all who work with refugees, also have an understanding and appreciation of the way of life and attitudinal differences of the Indochinese. We must strive not to reinforce the stereotype of the ugly Americans on our own soil.*

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*Through making an effort "to start where the chart is" the service providers may find that their work has become more satisfying and their communication more effective. In turn, this will lead to greater harmony in cross-cultural relations.

(h) Cross-Cultural Communication

Touching is frequently used by Americans to convey caring. However, in interacting with Indochinese people, it is important not to touch students on the head because it is considered to be the place where the spirit abides. It is acceptable if a teacher touches the shoulders of a student of the same sex.

Doctors, teachers, etc may find it helpful to anticipate questions that patients or students might have. Due to the esteem attributed to teachers and professionals in Indochina, refugees would feel extremely uncomfortable about asking questions, and they would expect the professional to be sensitive to what information they require.

Cross-cultural communication could be facilitated if community agencies provided information on thier services that have been translated into Indochinese languages.

The use of trained bilingual interpreters and translators could serve to decrease the frustrations of Americans and Indochinese alike.

Leaders should be identified within the local Indochinese communities. They could act as consultants about the needs of various age groups within their communities; the impact of agency policies, etc., and the best ways of informing community members about available services.

Attention should be given to establishing an international, centralized Research Clearing House or Indochinese educational, economic, social, and cultural adjustment.

CONCLUSION

It is the conviction of the writer that the ultimate goal in resettling refugees in the United States is to make the newcomers

not only tax payers but also happy citizens. In order to arrive at that goal, not only do we need to assist them in becoming economically self-sufficient, gut we also need to help them, and ourselves, to have a better mutual understanding and appreciation. The American dream of liberty, equality, and freedom will not be completely realized until the newcomers--the refugees and immigrants--are given their chance to enjoy them and to contribute their human heritage to our cultural plurality.

It is most encouraging to note countless success stories of the Indochinese resettling in the United States. It is the author's belief that the qualities of flexibility of these people enable them to overcome incredible odds to re-establish their lives in their new environment. It is also the writer's firm belief that had we listened to Henry David Thoreau and returned to nature, we Americans would not have had the problems of natural devastation, pollution, and the Three Mile Island nuclear tests. The refugees and immigrants from Indochina in particular and from Asia and the Pacific in general, have a lot to offer to us in terms of harmony with ourselves, others, and the rest of the universe. Is it not high time for us to have a balance between our technological progress and the nurturing of our human and natural environment?

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APPENDICES

1. Overview on Indochina

2. Cambodia

3. Laos

4. Vietnam

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Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos are situated on the part of mainland Southeast Asia between India and China. In 1893, the French proclaimed the area to be the Indochinese Union. In the Geneva Conference of 1954 separate treaties were ratified allowing the three nations to be independent.

The initial discussion will focus on customs and values shared by "Indochinese" refugees. After this, the history, language, and cultural aspects of each country will be discussed separately.

Family Life

The "typical" structure of Indochinese families includes grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives in addition to parents and children. A young married couple may live in the home of one of the parents, while other relatives live nearby.

The father is the head of the household in the immediate family, and he is supposed to uphold family traditions and set the moral standard for his family. Traditionally, parents and the elderly are given a lot of respect from children and youth. The oldest child has the responsibility of caring for younger siblings, who in turn obey and respect him.

Sometimes this closeness is weakened in refugee families when the children are exposed to different values in American culture. Refugees may try to rebuild family ties, by trying to live in the proximity of other family members in America.

Education

Refugees in the U.S. come from a wide range of educational backgrounds. Many of the K-12 age refugees have had major disruptions to their schooling since 1975, and because of ad hoc schooling while they stayed in refugee camps.

Education is highly valued. Reasons for this come from various religious

traditions that stress understanding and harmony, and respect for the spirit.

Teachers were highly respected under the French school system operating in Indochina until 1975. A didactic teaching method was used, and children were not encouraged to ask questions.

Thus, refugee children and their parents may have difficulty adjusting to the more participatory style of learning practiced in the U.S.

Religion

There is a great diversity among religions in the region. Ancestor worship and spiritual reverence to gods or objects are common. Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditions such as Christianity or Islam are frequently practiced.

The important ritual of visiting ancestral graves may make separation from their homeland even more difficult for some refugees.

Traditional medical practices may require a folk doctor or shaman to rid the evil spirits, or prescribe herbal remedies.

Eating Habits

Food and related hospitality are an important part of Indochinese cultures. Rice (usually glutinous or long-grained) is eaten with most meals. The diet is supplemented with meat (especially beef and pork), poultry, fresh fruits and vegetables.

American food and its method of preparation may seem unappetizing to refugees initially.

Employment

Many refugees are accustomed to farming and fishing and devoting their lives to a single job or a single company. Fixed work hours, career change and upward mobility, may be unfamiliar concepts. Manual labor is traditionally regarded as low status work in Indochina, and so some refugees may view such unemployment offers in the U.S. as demeaning.

CAMBODIA

Geography and Climate

Cambodia is a rich agricultural country, approximate in size to the state of Missouri. Most Cambodians live in villages, and landless tenants are relatively unknown. Farmers generally had an adequate living standard, tending rice and orchard plots.

Dominant features of the largely plains country are the Thongle Sap (Great Lake) and the Mekong River.

History

Originally known as Funan (100-500 A.D.) and later Cheula (500-800 A.D.), Cambodia under the Angkor period (800 A.D.-1432) had many accomplishments in culture, arts and architecture. The Angkor Wat temple erected during this period is one of the seven wonders of the world, and it is displayed on the Cambodian flag.

Between the end of the 13th century and becoming a French Protecorate in 1864, there were struggles for territory between the Thais and the Khmers, the dominant ethnic group in Cambodia. Prince Norodom Sihanouk led the country to independence in 1954, was overthrown in 1970. The Khmer Rouge (Khmer Communists) gained control in 1975 under Pol Pot. In 1979, Vietnamese Communists overran Cambodia, and installed a puppet government headed by Heng Samrin. Pol Pot and his supporters escaped into the jungle and initiated an ongoing guerilla campaign, hoping to regain control in the future.

The People of Cambodia

In 1975 the population of Cambodia was estimated to be 8 million with about 85% ethnic Khmer (Cambodians). A considerable number of Khmer lived outside of the country in sections of Thailand and South Vietnam that were formerly part of the Cambodian kingdom.

After six years of the Communist regime, starvation, disease and continuous fighting, only 3 or 4 million people are believed to remain. It is said that the Cambodian people have been psychologically devastated. Even when they have a chance to resettle, they still think about and grieve for loved ones who have perished or disappeared during the war.

Family Life

The nuclear family is more prevalent in Cambodia than the extended family found in other Southeast Asian countries. Religious practices and socializing usually take place within the family structure. The males are expected to be actively involved in community and religious life. Within the family, the wife is primarily responsible for the socialization of the children, and all financial matters. She is typically given great respect both within the family and the wider community.

Marriage

Compared with Americans, Cambodians, especially those living in rural areas, maintain traditional values regarding marriage and sexual behavior. Sexual matters are not freely discussed and marriages are usually arranged by the parents.

All sexual standards tend to be more flexible for men than for women. Divorce is legal but not common, and is usually discouraged.

Language

Khmer (also known as Cambodian) is the official language of Cambodia, and is the mother tongue of the ethnic Khmer. Unlike other languages of Indochina, it is non-tonal and has a number of two-syllable words. The writing system is complex.

Names

Before the French arrived, every Cambodian had one given (first) name, such as Ek, Bo, Phal or Chamreun. The name has a personal, specialized

meaning, as it is chosen for the child by an astrologer. Cambodians prefer to be addressed by their given name.

The French arbitrarily imposed the system of surname-given name. The last name always precedes the given name: for example, Sok San. Sok is the surname and San is the given name. The family name is usually the name of a father, grandfather or great grandfather.

Informally, a woman is called by her given name: for example, Miss Rith Bopha, and formally by her husband's name: for example, Mrs. Sok San.

Customs, Traditions and Beliefs

Religion

Theravada Buddhism is followed by nearly 85% of the population, and has been the official religion in Cambodia. Theoretically it requires that followers take full responsibility for their own actions. The pagoda is the center of the community in rural areas but in larger cities, traditional practices have decreased.

Animism, a belief in supernatural beings, is practiced in some remote areas. Christianity is also found in Cambodia.

Holidays and Celebrations

The biggest Khmer celebration is New Years, a three-day celebration beginning on April 13. It is a time for visiting relatives and friends, taking food to the temple, and attending religious ceremonies.

"All Soul's Day," regularly celebrated on September 15, is the most important ceremony. It is a day of prayer for the souls of those who have died. There are several Buddhist religious holidays.

Khmer Music and Dance

Like Khmer architecture, sculpture, literature or dance, Khmer music is characterized by its spiritual nature.

Classical dance dates from the Angkor period.

Education

Public education began only last century. Most Cambodians now complete elementary school and many continue into college. Until 1975, education was standardized throughout the country, and it was provided at three levels.

Level 1: elementary school through grade 6;

Level 2: lycee, a high school, through grade 13; and

Level 3: university-level studies

Food and Eating Habits

Rice is always served with meals. Pork, chicken and fish, vegetable and fresh fruit are included.

Most Cambodians use spoons to eat, other use forks, and others of Chinese descent use chopsticks.

Social Customs

Many Cambodian customs and practices differ from American ones. The greeting involves placing the hands together near ones own face. The height of the hands is an indication of the esteem felt for the other person. Children are greeted in order of their age and never interrupt adult conversation.

The head is considered to be the most important part of the body (the place where the spirit resides), thus it is extremely insulting to touch a Cambodian's head.

Feet are the lowest part of the body in value, and it is impolite to step over someone's feet or legs.

The politeness of Cambodians may sometimes make them appear shy to Westerners. For example,invitations must be repeated to be seen as sincere. Similarly, indirectness seems much more polite to a Cambodian than direct confrontation.

LAOS

Geography and Climate

Laos is a landlocked country whose economy is based largely on agriculture. It has an area of 91,000 square miles. Economic development is limited due to the lack of transportation and communication.

History

In 685 A.D. the Lao people moved from the Yunan area of China and settled in the northern part of Laos and Thailand. By 1779, the three major kingdoms were colonized by the King of Thailand. Many unsuccessful attempts by the Laos to free themselves from Thai domination followed. By 1893, France took control of Indochina, and in 1907 a treaty was signed dividing Laos into two nations, one under French control, and the other under Thailand.

The Japanese conquered Laos during the Second World War, but the French regained control in 1946.

Many Lao leaders fled to Thailand to create a "Free Movement" that was successful in gaining greater independence in 1949. Those who remained in Thailand, founded a movement known as the "Pathet Lao," led by Prince Souphanouvong.

Laos achieved full independence in 1954, but power struggles continued. A coalition government formed in 1962 under Souvanna Phouma received U.S. aid. This support was phased out in 1973 when a coalition between the communist Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao Government was created. By 1975, communist control was total. The current exodus of refugees began at that time, as those who resisted the communist control escaped the country.

The People of Laos

Many ethnic groups live within Laos. The lowland Lao who live along the

rivers are the largest single group. Other ethnic groups, upper-land (Lao Theung), and highland (Hmong and Mien) Lao, often support themselves by slash and burn farming.

1. The Lao

Family Life

Larger extended families form the central social unit in Laos. Four generations may live in one house. As the traditional head of the family the man makes critical decisions and is responsible for the household's general well being. Women take care of financial matters, cooking and household chores. Children, whose respect and obedience are demanded, commonly remain in their parents home even after marriage.

Marriage

A marriage is usually approved of by both parents. The groom or his family must pay a dowery to the parents of the intended bride.

A Lao man may have several wives, although the custom is now rare.

Childbirth

Most women who live in towns give birth in a hospital while women in the countryside give birth at home, assisted by their husband and a mid-wife. After a 30 day recovery period, a well-wishing ceremony, "Sou-Khouane" is performed, followed by a feast.

Death and Funerals

Most people prefer cremation, their ashes being kept in a pagoda until a tower can be built for them. There are no funeral homes in Laos, so the body id usually kept at home until the funeral.

Buddhist priests must be present at any funeral ceremony.

Language

The Lao language is basically monosyllabic and tonal. The writing system is an Indian-based alphabet and written from left to righ

Names

Lao names are written in this way: Souksomboun Sayasithsena. Souksomboun is the given name, and Sayasithsena is the last or family name. Most names usually have a positive meaning. A married woman normally takes her husband's family name.

Customs, Traditions and Beliefs

Religion

The majority of Lao people are Buddhists, although other religions are practiced by a minority. Most Lao parents prefer having a son, because he can enter the monkhood and participate in the teaching of Buddhism. Before marriage, most Lao men are required to enter monkhood for at least two to three weeks.

Holidays and Celebrations: Lao New Year or "Pi Mai"

"Pi Mai" is the most widespread and popular celebration, and usually occurs between April 12 and 15. It celebrates the beginning of spring and the start of the planting season.

During ceremonies in which the Buddha statuettes are bathed, people pray for the well-being and prosperity of their loved ones, and that the water will wash away their sins and misfortunes. They then pour water over one another and wish each other a Happy New Year.

Lao Music and Crafts

Dance movements are stylized and folk music forms an integral part of all festivals.

Craftsmanship, particularly in the production of objects for household and farm use is highly developed.

Education

Kindergartens and pre-schools are usually private and expensive.

Children start public school at six years. Students must pass exams at the end of elementary school and at the end of tenth and twelfth grades, in order to proceed to the next level.

Food and Eating Habits

Favorite goods include glutinous or sweet rice, Padek (a Lao-style fish sauce, hot peppers, and lemon grass). Fresh meat is preferred to frozen meat, and so Lao people in the U.S. look for opportunities to hunt deer, or to have cattle slaughtered for them.

In Laos, most families sit on the floor around a rattan table, although city people may prefer a Western-style dining table. Rice is usually eaten by hand, but spoons, forks and chopsticks may be used.

Laotians stress the importance of meals and are well known for their hospitality.

Social Customs

The usual form of greeting or leaving is the "wai," which consists of joining hands with open palms together, raising them from the chest or head, depending on the degree of respect one wishes to express.

Lao people do not typically shake hands with older people unless the elder offers his hand first.

Laotians never kiss as a form of greeting. In fact, it is shocking to most women to be kissed by a male or female in public.

2. The Hmong

For centuries, the Chinese and other Southeast Asians have called the Hmong "Miao." They take offense at this because it means "barbarian," and refer to themselves as "Hmong" or "freeman."

History

50,000 Hmong migrated from China to northern Laos in the early 19th century to find more land for farming and to escape hostile neighbors. By

the mid 1960's the population had grown to 350,000.

Located near the border of North Vietnam, they have never had a peaceful life. Most of the Hmong men from 12 to 55 years old were recruited by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency to fight the North Vietnamese and Laotian Communist forces in Laos in order to block North Vietnamese expansion to South Vietnam. When the Royal Lao government collapsed, they were forced to flee the country or risk being slaughtered because of their involvement in efforts to rescue American pilots who had been shot down over North Vietnam, or in other American military operations over a fifteen year period.

A few of the Hmong families were airlifted to safety in Thai camps, but thousands were abandoned and had to run for their lives through the jungle. Those who remained were sent to reeducation camps, gassed or killed.

Many Hmong were assaulted, abused or killed during their 20-25 day walk from the hills of Laos to Thailand.

The Clan

The Hmong are intensely clannish people who put a great deal of trust in their leaders. Admission to a clan can be by birth, marriage or adoption. The head of the clan "communicates" with deceased ancestors of clan members in specific rituals.

Marriage

Marriages are a form of social exchange and a price for the bride is usually arranged by both sides. The idea of paying for the bride is to assure the wife that she will be highly valued. A man can have more than one wife, and the second wife usually has less prestige than the first.

Language

The Hmong language is tonal, and is related to Yao or Mien. The various dialects of the three tribes may be mutually intelligible or differ considerably.

Religion

The Hmong believe in many supernatural beings, and reincarnation. Although many Hmong become Christians or Buddhists, some retain the Chinese religious customs that they adopted before coming to Laos.

Education

Most Hmong are unable to read or write in any language. They teach their children orally. Days, months and years are counted by marking dashes on the walls. They did not have access to Lao schools until the 1960's, when they were forced to move to the lowlands from the mountains, where there were no schools, books or signs.

Social Customs

The Hmong are usually very hospitable people. They will not hesitate to bring out the whiskey, which has been fermenting for months or to stay and visit until late into the night. Women almost never participate in such social visits with strangers. They retire early since they must get up long before daybreak to begin their numerous daily chores.

3. The Mien

Originating in Central China, the Mien were originally related to the Hmong ethnic group.

Childbirth

The expectant mother does not talk of being pregnant, as it is important to conceal the matter from ever-hovering evil spirits. A mother may be ill at ease if outsiders compliment her "pretty child," because she fears that spirits may harm the child.

Religion

Mien practice animism with a host of gods and nature spirits.

Education

The majority of Mien are illiterate in their own language. A segment

of youth can read or write Lao to some degree.

Food

The Mien diet comprises rice, green vegetables and some red peppers. Pork and chicken are used mainly at festival times and for guests.

4. The Tai-Dam

The Tai-Dam are a relatively small ethnic group that most recently lived in Vientiane. They originally lived in Vietname and have always maintained their own cultural characteristics.

While some of them are practicing Christrians, as a result of past missionary efforts, most are Buddhists and animists.

Family Life

Family life is characterized by the size and closeness of families. Great respect is accorded the elders.

5. The Lao-Theung

The Lao-Theung, another ethnic group found in Laos, lived primarily in mountainous areas. There are approximately 700 in the U.S. mostly in the Stockton, California area, and some in Arkansas.

They are processed as Lao refugees, but they identify more closely with the Hmong. They were animists until 1960, when most were converted to Christianity. They were forced out of their homeland like other ethnic groups by the military struggle.

VIETNAM

Geography and Climate

Vietnam occupies the whole 1200 to 1400 miles of coastline from the Chinese border on the north to the Gulf of Siam in the south. The total land area is 127,000 square miles of beautiful mountainous plains, and small deserts. It is about the size of the state of New Mexico.

The climate is tropical with greater seasonal differences in the north. Damaging typhoons sweep across the coast irregularly between July and November, when very heavy rain occurs.

Vietnam is a predominantly agricultural country, with an estimated 80% of the population (1979 estimates: 53 million) farmers.

History

Crawford presented a simplified history of dates and events by dividing them into five eras:[1]

2879 B.C. to 111 B.C. - Establishment of a nation

111 B.C. to A.D. 938 - Chinese domination

1883 to 1954 - French domination after World War II

The first era is described in legends. It is important that the Vietnamese emigrated from central China.

The second era characterized by Chinese domination is significant for the great influence the Chinese had on the culture of the Vietnamese, whose earliest formal records and literature are recorded in Chinese. The end of this area was a time of revolt. One of the early rebellions was led by two sisters, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi.

During the era of the dynasties, especially during the eleventh century Ly Dynasty, the country was unified, and cultural development and Buddhism were established.

During the French administration France was established as the second language and great advances were made in the areas of medicine, architecture, administration and education. In the latter part of this era, as France fell in World War II, the Japanese occupied and exploited the country, while still maintaining the French colonial administration.

As the Japanese and French were reducing their involvement, the independence of Vietnam was realized. Ho Chi Minh established the "Democratic Republic" in Hanoi, while a national government was organized in Hue.

The attempt of France to reinstate her colonial regime forcefully and the Vietminh decision to oust them from Hanoi started the war that began a "duel between world communism and democracy."[2]

The French withdrew in 1954, and millions of refugees fled into South Vietnam.

The early 1960's were marked by a steadily increasing penetration of South Vietnam by Vietnamese Communist guerillas known as the Viet Cong.

Beginning in early 1965, the pace of the war accelerated sharply. From being largely supportive and advisory, the U.S. role increasingly became one of active combat. The internal political situation in South Vietnam was in turmoil. After the coup d' état in 1963, President Ngo Dinh Diem was killed, and successive military regimes ruled.

Finally, after persistent peace talks and negotiations, a peace agreement was signed in Paris in January 1973.

The peace agreement was intended to bring about a cease-fire, the beginning of negotiations between the two Vietnams towards a political settlement, and the withdrawal of foreign military forces. All U.S. forces withdrew within the stipulated 60-day period. While South Vietnam lost the vital support of the U.S. and had too little time to consolidate its own

strength, North Vietnam continued a massive infiltration of troops and military supplies. The defense system in the south disintegrated rapidly and Saigon finally fell to the Communists on April 30, 1975, causing a massive and chaotic evacuation of at least 100,000 vulnerable people in a few days. Then followed a continued exodus of refugees seeking asylum.

The People of Vietnam

About 85% of Vietnam's population (1960's estimate - 15 to 16 million in the south and 16 to 17 million in the north) is ethnically Vietnamese.[3] The remaining 15% includes three principal groups: Chinese, Montagnards and Khmer.

1. The Vietnamese

The family is the basis of the social identity of the individual, and the structure is paternal. A man looks first to his family for help and counsel in times of personal crisis. A married woman joins the family of her husband. Filial piety is considered one of the most important duties of a person. The traditional household consists of three generations.

Language

Vietnamese is basically monosyllabic, and it has six tones, which give it a sing-song effect. The three main dialects correspond to the geographic regions of north, central and south.

Early in the 20th century, Vietnam adopted a modified Roman alphabet to replace the old writing system adapted from Chinese characters.

French was used in government administration and education from 1904 to 1945. However, with the American involvement in the late 1960's, the use of English increased and eventually took precedence over the French language.

Names

Vietnamese names are written in reverse order of American names:

family name, middle name, and given name.

The family name is placed first to emphasize a person's roots. There are about 300 family names, and the family name Nguyễn is used by at least half of the population.

A Vietnamese is addressed and referred to by his personal name. For example: Nguyễn Văn Hai - Hai being his personal name - would be called Mr. Hai. The Vietnamese woman usually keeps her maiden name upon marriage.

The middle name may indicate the sex of a person (Văn for males, Thị for females).

The personal name often has a meaning that represents a precious object or a moral virtue.

Customs, Traditions and Beliefs

Religion

There is no official religion.[4] The majority of the population are Buddhists, but they may also be Confucianists and Taoists. "The Three Teachings" constitute the foundation of all customs and manners of the Vietnamese. The Taoist concept of harmony, the Confucian ethical and social principles, and the Buddhist theory of reincarnation and act retribution have been blended together to a form of philosophy and religion.

Christianity, mainly Roman Catholicism also exists in Vietnam.

Holidays and Celebrations

Tet or Lunar New Year is the most important feast of the year, which generally occurs in February. It is a family reunion, a spring festival and a national holiday. Since Vietnamese do not celebrate each individual's birthday, Tet is also everyone's birthday. This is also a time to pay homage to ancestors.

Education

Education has always been extremely important in Vietnamese society, and educated people have traditionally held an honored place.

Education was free and mandatory for all children from age six through the first five primary grades.

Secondary school was divided into two cycles; a four year cycle, followed by three years. Based largely on the old Chinese and French systems, education was by observation and memorization of subject matter, rather than experimentation and critical questioning.

Food and Eating Habits

Rice is the basic food, supplemented by vegetables, eggs and small amounts of meat and fish. Fruit such as bananas, mangoes and papayas are popular. "Nước Mắm" or fish sauce is a principal ingredient in most Vietnamese dishes.

Vietnamese are used to very little mild and milk products in their diet.

Social Customs

Great respect is shown to elders, superiors and strangers. Hugging between very close friends may be seen in some cases, but public kissing is not acceptable.

Beckoning with a finger up is considered a sign of contempt that is used only toward an animal. Instead, the palm of the hand is placed downward with a slight flutter of the fingers.

Because of their traditional sense of propriety, Vietnamese make every effort to maintain harmony in communicating with others. Frankness and outspoken expressions usually are considered rude, and true feelings are often veiled or communicated in an indirect manner.

2. The Ethnic Chinese

The ethnic Chinese population is estimated at about one million, nearly all of whom have adopted Vietnamese nationality. Most, however, faithfully observe Chinese customs and traditions. Essentially merchants and trade middlemen, they usually group themselves into highly organized economic colonies in the urban areas, and play an important role in the country's economy.

Death Rituals

Buddhist or Taoist rituals are performed to pacify the soul of the dead and to assure that they resettle peacefully during the transition period before the soul can be reborn again.

White dress is usually worn at the ceremonies. After the burial, a black patch or armband is usually worn by members of the family for a period of one month to a year. During this time they are discouraged from enjoying themselves by going to movies or parties.

Language

There is considerable diversity in dialects among the ethnic Chinese as well as some variety in customs. The dialects are Hokkien, Teochiu, Hakkas, Cantonese and Hainanese.

Customs

The Sino-Confucian tradition, with its emphasis on morality and ethics, propriety, close family ties, and respect for elders and authority is strong among the Chinese and Chinese educated. Bad experiences and feelings are shared only with close relatives and intimate friends, not with mere acquaintances.

Montagnards

This second largest minority group lives in the mountains of north and central Vietnam. They total about one million and include more than thirty tribes, representing numerous ethnic, social, language and cultural patterns.

Khmer

Estimated at about 500,000, the Khmer clusted in the Mekong delta area. A considerable number have adopted Vietnamese nationality, intermarried and share Vietnamese religion and customs.

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